

Committee on Resources

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Statement of Kelly Jordan, Chair

Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance

to the Subcommittee on Natural Parks, Recreation and Public Lands

re: H.R.1618 to create the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area

September 16, 2003

Dear Chairman Radanovich and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the many partners in the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance, I want to say how exciting it is to be here before you today. In particular, we want to thank our Congresswoman Denise Majette for her introduction of this legislation. It has been an honor for me to serve as chair of the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance for the past six years.

As we came to fully understand National Heritage Areas we saw what a productive partnership can be created between federal, state and local jurisdictions through this mechanism. The resulting national recognition, combined with a relatively small amount of federal support matched locally, can catalyze such great benefits for the people of Georgia and the United States.

Our local, state and national Alliance partners share a deep love and affection for this part of our country - a compact area where an amazing variety of industrial, agricultural and environmental treasures occur within such a relatively small region, just for instance:

- We have visible and documented Native American archaeological areas and rock quarries that extend back over 7000 years that have already designated historic sites at the local and federal level.
- One of our favorite people in Georgia, General William T. Sherman, wrote in his diary about camping at Arabia Mountain his first night out of Atlanta on his way back home in 1864.
- The granite rock quarries that began after the Civil War at Arabia and Lithonia, Georgia employed generations of Scottish, Welch and other immigrants to the United States and provided stone for historic buildings and areas all across the U.S., such as the West Point and Annapolis academies and Dupont Circle here in D.C. Lithonia granite is now being suggested as the material for the future Martin Luther King memorial in D.C. We are working with several of the major quarry industries such as Oldcastle Materials, LaFarge and Hanson Aggregates on several new projects including the creation of a major interactive historical museum.
- Of the numerous historic industrial, commercial and residential buildings in the area built out of the native stone, one is already listed on The National Register of Historic Places and other nominations are in the process.
- We are also now supporting the documentation and preservation of lesser known histories throughout the heritage area including the oldest and neglected African American cemetery that is home to the still unmarked grave of U.S. serviceman Lucious Sanders who founded the Lithonia Civic League to promote voting rights and is considered the "M.L.K. of Lithonia".
- With the help of our state government, the project has preserved for all time the last remaining dairy farm in DeKalb County - a urbanized county of 700,000 citizens which once was the dairy capitol of the entire state. Other agricultural history is preserved by hundreds of acres where the land terraces are visible from cotton farming when cotton was king in the South.
- Arabia Mountain itself is home to federally listed endangered, threatened and rare plant species and

fabulous displays of unusual plants and wild flowers year round and was itself a gift to the public a generation ago by the Davidson Minerals company

(now Hanson Aggregates).

- Panola Mountain near Arabia is already a designated National Natural Landmark and considered one of the finest rock outcrops in the eastern United States. Panola Mountain preservation was the first project of The Georgia Conservancy 36 years ago.

In sum, this compact Heritage Area can display the entire history of this part of the United States, from our Native Americans to the early settlers and farmers, through the Civil War to the great quarry industries and farming - and at the same time preserve a unique environmental heritage. Yet I wish to point out that this bill explicitly respects and preserves private property rights within the proposed heritage area.

It's an historical miracle that such an opportunity still exists in the year 2003 only twenty minutes from the downtown of a major urban center, particularly one growing like the Atlanta region. Think of the educational opportunities afforded by being within a one hour field trip of nearly half the school population of our entire state! We need to preserve and tell these stories and this legislation will help greatly.

Obviously we are enthusiastic, but to put that enthusiasm to the test, we conducted a thorough study of what an Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area could offer to the public. We hired the highly experienced ICON firm, which we retained for a nine month long study process. It was our pleasure to have the close and invaluable involvement of the Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program of The National Park Service Southeast Region Office all along the way. The study findings we believe successfully address all the proposed criteria set forth by the National Park Service for future national heritage areas. The entire study (and much more) is posted on our website at www.arabiaalliance.org.

In her statement (attached) to the Senate Subcommittee on National Parks on April 18, 2002 Brenda Barrett, National Coordinator for Heritage Areas within the National Park Service, said "The Department recognizes the appropriateness of designating the Arabia Mountain National Heritage Area, as the area has the characteristics necessary to be established as a national heritage area and the potential to meet the expectations of the National Park Service's national heritage area program. (There) are four critical steps that need to be completed before Congress establishes a national heritage area...The National Park Service believes that those criteria have been fulfilled through the work that was done by the Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance...in conducting the feasibility study that was issued in February 2001.

Finally, permit me a few words about partnership. The Arabia Mountain Heritage Area has the enthusiastic support of all relevant state and local partners:

- Local land owners have gifted over \$15 million in property.
- Local philanthropy has contributed over \$2 million in cash.
- Over \$22 million in land acquired by three counties.
- Over \$ 5 million in land acquired by the State of Georgia.
- Professional firms and individuals have donated untold hours.

We also have the invaluable support and participation from numerous national organizations such as The Conservation Fund, the Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy as well as state organizations such as The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, The Georgia Wildlife Federation, The Georgia Conservancy and many others.

We're proud of the bi-partisan nature of this project. In addition to Congresswoman Majette's leadership, Congressman John Linder has been a great supporter and his help was invaluable in drafting the bill. We have had the support and participation of the recently deceased Marine Corp. General Ray Davis who donated land to the project adjacent to his home and of course the support of another decorated serviceman and Lithonia native former Senator Max Cleland. We're proud also to say that this project occurs in a highly diverse area and has multi-racial involvement at all levels of the Alliance.

Finally, the Alliance has been honored by the support and involvement of the families and community

associations in the Arabia and Lithonia area ranging from the youngsters in our educational video to the 92 year old S.B. Vaughters (our last dairy farmer) to the Lithonia Woman's Club members and local garden clubs to the prominent families such as the Davidsons who gifted Arabia Mountain to the public over thirty years ago.

Yet despite our degree of local commitment and accomplishment to date, our full success very much needs the recognition and operational assistance that designation as a National Heritage Area would provide and we humbly ask for your support for this legislation.

Thank you very much for your time and interest. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

S. Kelly Jordan, Chair

Arabia Mountain Heritage Area Alliance

Attachments:

Heritage Area map

Statement of Brenda Barrett